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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Gottlieb Fregian approach to meaning of propositions and D. A. Brenders' use of that approach in his research. The paper argues that Brenders' theory is problematic and self-contradictory because of his adherence to Frege's distinctions coded in terms of idea and sense and reference on the word level, and judgment and thought and reference on the sentence level. The paper also includes a discussion of the fundamental differences on methodology between Brenders and W. B. Pearce and V.E. Cronen's communication theory. (RS)

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Frege's Foundational Approach to Propositions in Brender's Work
-A Critique of Brenders' Fregian tradition inheritance

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Brenders has contributed a generous amount of his paper to the alleged confusion of the concept of proposition by CMM. But if we review Brenders' own examples and his analysis of them for the allegation, we find that the confusion is on his side. Let us consider the following quote from Brenders paper (p. 3480), first:

"This distinction between establishing propositions and performing illocutionary acts also follows Searle to distinguish between propositional negation and negation of illocutionary force. Given the two sentences (numbers added by the author of this paper for easy reference):

- (1) I promise not to come.
- (2) I do not promise to come.

the first sentence negates the proposition contained in the sentence "I promise to come"; the second sentence is a negation of the illocutionary act of promising."

We find in the above that Brenders has made an implicit statement that he adopts Frege's concept of proposition. The known Fregian principle is "the meaning of a complex expression should be a function of the meaning of its parts" (Allwood et al, 1971, P. 130). In this perspective, a sentence can be decomposed into individual propositional structures and then sum up the truth values of individual propositional structures by using the truth table to arrive at the truth value of the whole sentence. This pure semantic approach is followed by Brenders because he argues, as shown in the quote, that "I promise not to come" contains a negated proposition. Brenders concludes his paper by stressing on the point that this semantic level of meaning should be preserved. However, as we will show, it is just this spirit of Brenders in trying to preserve this semantic meaning that has led him into committing several

grand mistakes. However, before we delve into a detailed discussion about those mistakes, I would like to show how Brenders ideas about the notion of proposition are rooted in the western tradition, typified by Frege's work.

Frege's Positivist Approach to Meaning

Frege published an article entitled "on sense and reference" about a hundred years ago and ever since the positivistic approach to meaning has developed into a tradition which has crucial influence in many current disciplines of academia in the world, for example, Chomsky's linguistics or cognitive psychology, etc. In "On Sense and Reference", Frege raised two major issues with regard to meaning: 1. How can one determine the meaning of a sign or a name; 2. how can one determine the meaning of a sentence.

To resolve the first issue, Frege postulated three concepts regarding the meaning of a sign or name: sense, reference and associated idea. According to Frege, a linguistic sign has sense which is the objective reflection of the world of reality. This objective reflection must be pure and absolute and devoid of any ambiguity and must be universally recognized as the common core for communication. Besides sense, a sign also has a referent, which is the corresponding object in the world that matches the sign. To Frege, a sign takes sense just because of the existence of such an objective thing in the world. In his own words, "it is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference" (Frege, 1892, p. 63). As for the concept of associated idea, Frege argued that the differences found in individual perceptions of any one object in the world are just differences in ideas associated with the sense of the sign of the object. So there is no direct relationship between the associated idea of the object with the object itself but

between the idea and the sense which is the objective reflection of the object. In other words, the sense of a sign mediates the idea and the object. Frege's position is that without the objective sense of any sign, there would be no way for the link to happen between ideas and world. So it is the researcher's job to locate the sense of the sign that corresponds exactly to the object in the world.

For clarification of his position with respect to distinctions between sense, referent and idea, Frege gave a famous analogy in terms of the relationship between the observer and the telescope and the object being observed through the telescope. Frege compared the Moon, for example, to the reference which is the object of the observation, and the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope to the sense, and the retinal image of the observer to the idea or experience. This analogy is intended to show that an objective optical image is necessary to mediate between individual differences in retinal images and the object in the world, in the same way that a sense is to mediate between ideas and reference.

Frege's analogical optical image as an objective reflection of the real world is questionable. First, there is no way of knowing that image is purely objective on the basis of the fact that individual retinal images vary in many ways. In other words, if people have different images on their retina, how could they know that one image among the myriad of different images is the only truly one that cuts across all different ones? Second, each person's perception of the Moon is based on his or her conceptual framework which differs necessarily depending on what culture the person involved is from and what set of academic vocabularies or native terms the education has provided the person and as a result persons will necessarily differ in what they see through the telescope. Third, the physical lens which in the analogy is supposed to

reflect without any deflection or bias the real image of the Moon are already human artifacts based on human's conceptions of what they want to see. In this sense, there is no way to guarantee that the lens are without any tint of bias. The conclusion is that such an analogy on the contrary reveals the deficiencies of Frege's meaning theory.

On the sentence level, Frege has duplicated the concepts used in the analysis of the meaning on the word level in terms of sign, thought and reference. This duplication has only one change, that is, the objective meaning of a sentence is called thought instead of sense used in addressing the word-level meaning analysis. In spite of the little change, the concepts are essentially the same except for the differences in the values of those concepts. According to Frege, "every declarative sentence concerned with the reference of its words is therefore to be regarded as a proper name, and its reference, if it has one, is either the True or the False" (Frege, p. 63). Then, thought, like sense that mediates ideas and the objects in the world, mediates between what Frege calls judgments and True or False. Notice the capitalization of the two words "true" and "false" because Frege considered those two as the sole objects or real things in the world that match the meaning of a sentence.

In the triad relationship, judgments are individualistic and can be plagued with biases, but, to Frege, there is always one and only one judgement that exactly matches the thought involved to either true and false. In order to make sure about the absolute and isomorphic and correct matching result between the thought and the value, which is either true or false, Frege argues that one needs to compute the senses of terms or signs that make up the thought. The final result of the computation is the summative values of individual terms found in the thought. At this summation step, it brings us back to Frege's argument for the distinction between sign and sense

and referent and ideas. What Frege calls for is a checking process first from the word level to make sure about the sense and referent of the term rather than the idea of the term, and then sum up the values of the checking results to get one final true or false value. It is obvious that each checking act of the relationship between the sense and the referent of a term is independently a judgement to yield either true or false. So, one could say after the checking process that it is true that the term "moon" indeed refers to the object hanging in the sky and it is false that the term "the bald king of France" refers to anybody in the world. The conclusion is that what Frege means by saying that the meaning of a sentence, regardless of its complexity, is the function of the meaning of its parts is just the summation process of the values of those individual judgements of the individual names in the sentence.

To define "thought", Frege says that he refuses the subjective performance of thinking but its objective content, which is capable of being the common property of several thinkers. (Frege, p. 62). But in our view, the objectivity of being a thought is hard to be reached, even impossible. Take a simple example. How can people agree objectively and universally on such a simple thought as "Mary is running". A Fregian scholar like Brenders might have no problem in deciding on the reference of the name "Mary", in spite of fact that there are different persons in the same name "Mary" in the world and it is hard to identify one without recourse to the contexts; but he or she might have great difficulty in determining what specific acts in time and speech can be universally counted as running but not jogging or other. Our position is that objectivity of a thought, Frege's terminology, is an illusion and subject itself to interpretations based on individual differences in life-scripts, forms of life, social contexts, and conceptual framework.

In the above we have discussed the Fregean approach to meaning and particularly we have in a nutshell way demonstrated the difficulties in taking those perspectives to understand meaning both on the word and sentence level. Our point is to show that Brenders has followed that tradition in arguing that CMM has not made a clear distinction between sense and reference and truth values on the one hand and those pragmatic uses of the word or sentence involved in different contexts on the other. The ideal Brenders argues for is to keep the objective meaning part clear and intact and then talks about their different uses in different contexts. Therefore, he compliments Searle's speech acts theory by saying that Searle can talk of meaning outside of perlocutionary response and still speak to such philosophical concerns as "reference", "prediction" and the establishment of "propositions" within a general notion of meaningful utterances (Brenders, 1987, p. 340). What we are going to show in the following section is how problematic and self contradictory Brenders theory is, due to the stubbornness in observance of Frege's distinctions coded in terms of idea and sense and reference on the word level and judgement and thought and reference on the sentence level.

Brenders Failures in Following Frege's Tradition

First, Brenders' semantic concept of proposition calls one major thesis of his paper into question. Notice that he also maintains that propositions should be incorporated within the notion of illocutionary force. (Brenders, p. 341). In this view, it follows that "not to come" is not only a negation of a proposition but also a negation of a kind of speech act because "propositions do not exist outside of speech acts" according to Brenders (p. 342). This implication can lead to absurdity, because it means that a complex sentence could be said as enacting several speech acts. Even

worse, since a sentence can be theoretically infinitely long by recursion it could then enact an infinite number of speech acts. This is absurd to the current speech acts theory which claims that normally one sentence establishes one speech act. Such a claim makes sense because a person utters one sentence, no matter how long and complex it is, to do one thing in terms of speech acts. In specific, people can say a sentence to make a promise or a request, but not both at the same time. The conclusion is that Brenders' move to adopt both the Fregian approach to propositions and his notion that every proposition is also a kind of speech act will inevitably bring absurdity or at least unnaturalness to the present speech acts theory and also to the applicability of common sense that one speech act is interpreted at a time for one sentence uttered.

Second, Brenders has also made a philosophical confusion, in asserting that "I promise not to come" is a negation of proposition while "I do not promise to come" is a negation of the speech act of promising. The issue is: can we negate a speech act? To put the question in another form, can an action be negated? Our answer is no. To us, an act is either enacted or not enacted. Or an action is either done or not done. There is no such a possibility for an action to be done and not done at the same time, which is an absurd logic. Action can not be negated once it is done. If it is not done, there is no such a question as to whether it can or can not be negated since it does not exist. In specific, one can promise or not promise; if it is the former, one can not negate it once the act of promising is done. Based on this line of reasoning, we find that Brender's argument, perhaps also Searle's, that "I do not promise to come" is a negation of the speech act of promising is incomprehensible. Equally incomprehensible is Brenders idea that "I promise not to come" is a negation of a

proposition which, to him, is also a speech act. For further clarification of our point, consider committing a crime in analogy. The obvious truth is there are only two choices, either the crime being or not being committed. Once the crime is committed, it can not be negated. To understand such a truth seems to be easy; however, Brenders and perhaps Searle have denied such a simple truth by implying that any speech act can be negated. This is a philosophical mistake, we think.

Third, it seems obvious in Brenders' paper that he is advocating and seeking a kind of analysis in which both truth values of propositional structures and the speech acts of utterances could be equally talked about without much ado. We think, however, this is an illusion, because every purported proposition is potentially ambiguous. In other words, truth values can be hard to find for any given proposition. One difficulty with regard to the determination of the truth value of a proposition is the potential ambiguity of reference of definite descriptions such as "the murderer", "her husband" etc, as laid out in Donnellan's work (1966). He has distinguished between two uses of definite descriptions: the attributive use and the referential use. For example, the expression "Smith's murderer is insane" can be used either attributively or referentially depending upon the situation. This means that without recourse to the contexts, there would be no way to find out whether that expression is used attributively or referentially. If this is the case, how could one determine the truth value of the sentence under the condition that one part of the sentence is ambiguous? For clarification of terminology, by using a definite expression attributively, Donnellan means that there is no particular person or thing in the speaker's mind that fits that expression. For example, suppose we all know the brutal manner of the killing of Smith and we all love him. Hearing Smith is murdered, one person might exclaim that

"Smith's murderer is insane". In saying so, the speaker has no particular person in mind as to who is the real murderer. On the other hand, by using a definite expression referentially, Donnellan means that there is a particular person on the scene that exactly fits that expression. For example, suppose Jones is in the process of being on trial, we are in the court discussing how he murdered Smith. Then, one of the persons in the discussion might sum up the discussion by saying that "Smith's murderer is insane". In this case, the expression is used referentially, that is, everybody knows what that expression is referring to, namely, Jones. After this analysis, Donnellan argues that "the view that sentences can be divided up into predicates, logical operators, and referring expressions is not generally true. In the case of definite descriptions one can not always assign the referential function in isolation from a particular occasion on which it is used" (Donnellan, 1966, p. 100). Our point is to show that Brenders' concept of proposition does not help in understanding real life situations as shown by Donnellan because we need to resort to contexts to resolve ambiguities.

Brenders' positivist approach to the concept of proposition has led himself into making another inextricable mistake with respect to the question of negation. The mistake resides in his limited notion of negation on the sentence level to decide on what he calls a negation of a proposition or a speech act, when in fact the concept of negation is operative in a context larger than a sentence level. Consider the two illustrative sentences given by Brenders and quoted early in this paper again. One obvious fact seems to be that those two sentences differ just in the syntactic position of the negative word "not" on the sentence level. According to Brenders and perhaps Searle as well, this syntactic difference has caused a difference in what is negated.

This seems to be saying that the syntactic position of a negative word like "not" with respect to other constituents of the sentence has a crucial bearing on the identity of a proposition or a speech act. The sole dependence on the syntactic position of a negative word to identify a proposition or a speech act is very misleading, because it denies the contribution of social contexts to the realization of negation. The reason why Brenders has focused on the sentence level for his observations and analyses of negation is that he is obsessed so much with the concept of proposition as a sentential phenomenon that has a true or false value that he has extended his obsession to the analysis of negation also on the sentence level to distinguish between a proposition and a speech act. If we do not take this positivistic Fregean and Russellian approach in the way Brenders does, we will then take contexts into account in understanding negation. More specifically, if we understand the sense of the sentence not in terms of its truth functions but of its felicity conditions, we will come to the conclusion that negation is not necessarily related to the question of whether or not the word "not" is uttered or what is the syntactic position of "not" in the sentence. In a word, we need to extend our analysis of negation from the sentence level to the level of social contexts which are organized hierarchically and from which meaning is drawn. To support our point, first, imagine a situation in which one of the felicity conditions is not met for the act of promising while every other conditions fall into place. For example, if the conversing partner has no intent to expect a promise from the speaker, the act of promising will be thwarted when the speaker has realized later that the partner is not interested in getting what is promised and because of that he has decided to abort his promise. In this situation, the utterance with the header of "I promise" has not guaranteed that the act of promising is completed. Put it in another

way, although there is not a single negative word in the sentence, negation is still possible in having a speech act thwarted by interactionists. In this sense, negation is rooted in contexts.

On the other hand, the appearance of a negative word like "not" before the matrix or minor verb in the sentence does not mean necessarily that the felicity conditions are not met. For example, if one says "I do not promise you to come if you do not listen to me" he is not obviously negating the felicity conditions but is trying to construct them by imposing a condition to the audience. For another example, we can imagine a situation in which Person A could literally utter "I do not promise to come" when actually means to say "I promise to come" when Person B has noticed a wink in Person A's eyes and when Person B is able to understand this wink as meaning to cover the real message from the knowledge of the third party in the presence when Person A utters that sentence. Along the same line of reasoning, a negative word that appears before a proposition (in Brenders' terms) does not necessarily forfeit the pertinency of the proposition to the concurrent situation if, for example, one can understand the clenching of teeth as an indication of forthcoming punishment in spite of the fact that the person has said in a sarcastic tone: "I promise not to punish you.", in which the negative word appears but plays no role in terms of the satisfaction of the felicity conditions of negation of what ever is involved.

It is clear that Brenders has made a correlation between the position of the negative word and the type of negation involved in the sentence. The reliance on the syntactic position of a sentence-constituent in determining the kinds of speech acts will create other problems as illustrated in Sentence (3) in the following:

(3) I do not think that John has married Susan.

According to Brenders, the above sentence should be a negation of a speech act of thinking because the negative "not" appears before the matrix verb "think". But to me this is not true because the negation in the sentence is transferred to the embedded sentence. Logically the sentence should read as: I think that John has not married Susan. The point is that the decision on what kind of speech act a sentence is enacting can not be told by the form of the sentence or by the syntactic position of a certain word. It can only be told by contexts, by life scripts or any level in the hierarchy of meaning as explicated in CMM.

One implication of Brenders' argument that "I do not promise to come" is a negation of a speech act of promising is that it presupposes the speech act of promising as existing prior to the negation, otherwise the negation would not make any sense, because a priori one can not negate something vacuous. As shown before, I strongly doubt this kind of philosophy that speech acts can be negated. However, even though we make a concession to follow Brenders' logic, we might meet other insurmountable problems. For example, in Sentence (3) above, if we follow Brender's view that a speech act can be negated, we would admit that the sentence presupposes the existence of the speech act of thinking otherwise the negation would be vacuous. But once we presuppose a speech act thinking for the negation to take place, we would run into an epistemological issue with those speech acts like thinking, believing, hoping, etc. It is noticeable, however, that this issue will not be provoked with other kinds of verbs. For example, if I say "I promise you to come", I know I am making a promise by the act of saying that sentence. Similarly, if I say "I advise you to quit smoking", I know that I am making an advice by the act of uttering that sentence. But can we presuppose "I am thinking that John has not married Susan" by the act of

uttering "I do not think John has married Susan" in order to negate it? If we follow Brender's logic the answer is yes because he and also Searle perhaps have invoked the notion that a negation of a speech act is possible, as shown in their arguments for Sentence (1) and (2). But if the answer is yes, we will face the music of self recursivity or recursive wonder in terms of CMM, because it raises the question of how does one know that one knows that one knows that one is thinking so that based on self knowledge of thinking one can negate the speech act of thinking. Harre talks about this issue in detail (Harre, 1984). The question Harre raises is whether the kind of sentence "I know that I know..." can even be said. Harre's answer is no, because to him thinking is reflexive and can not be known. So it seems that Harre would argue that "I know that I know..." is nonsensical in the same way as "I know that I have a pain" because the act of knowing and having a pain is physically function of the biological mechanisms of the body. It is found in some culture, as argued in Harre's work, such a kind of sentence as "I know I have a pain" is never heard spoken, because it does not make sense conceptually. The point is if that kind of sentence can not be said, it can not be presupposed, because any presupposed sentence must have a truth value, according to pure semantics. But if thinking as a speech act can not even be presupposed how can it be right for Brenders to say that "I do not think John has married Susan" contains a negation of the speech act of thinking in the same way as he argues with respect to Sentence (2) that it contains a negation of the speech act of promising? If we can not presuppose the existence of any speech act, then Brenders' statement that Sentence (2) is a negation of the speech act of promising does not make any sense at all because the patient of negation does not exist in the first place. Then a question may arise: what is negated in Sentence (2) or

(3) if neither is a negation of the speech act? An answer to this question falls beyond the scope of this paper, however.

To sum up, in this section, I have shown that Brenders' Fregean and Russellian approach to the concept of proposition has led him into making several mistakes. First, since he claims that a sentence can be broken down into propositional structures and since he also claims that a proposition is necessarily a speech act, he will induce such a possibility that a complex sentence might be claimed to have more than one speech act enacted, which is hard to be true. Second, since the negative word "not" is truth functional in pure semantics, Brenders has carried over such truth functional properties of "not" into the analysis of propositions and speech acts in his work. In doing so, he has inevitably made such an absurd claim that a speech act can be negated. Third, since he regards a sentence as being breakable into propositional structures, he has implicitly adopted the semantist notion that a sentence is a predicate structure which consists of referential arguments and predicates and which can be assigned with a truth value. This notion is untenable because the reference of an expression is potentially ambiguous as shown by Donnellan to the effect that it is not possible to decide on the truth value of any given proposition in pure semantic terms. Therefore, Brenders' concept of proposition is in principle ungrounded. Lastly, biased by Brenders' tendency to interpret meanings on the sentence level, he has erroneously correlate the issue of negation with the syntactic position of the negatives in the sentence, rather than with the contexts beyond the sentence level. The consequence of Brenders' relying on the syntactic position in determining whether it is the speech act or the proposition that has been negated will lead to serious ontological and epistemological problems.

Fundamental Differences in Methodology Between Brenders and CMM

CMM differs from Brenders' view in fundamental ways. The former belongs to world-view two, while the latter to the world view one. We can understand their differences better by looking at Wittgenstein who could represent these two world views by himself through the two periods of his mutually incompatible philosophical development. The early Wittgenstein represents world view one while the later Wittgenstein represents world view two.

Early Wittgenstein emphasizes the relationships between logic and language, and the world. In this view, there is a priori order of the world, and language is the exact mirror image of it. That is if we know one we can know the other. The link between the world and language can be achieved through a presupposed logic. By using language, people can make propositions and determine the truth or falsity of those by checking them against the reality of the world. Propositions can be simple or complex. A complex proposition can be broken down into elementary propositions which are simple and which can be checked against the atomic facts in the world to derive their respective truth values, and the complex proposition is just the truth function of those individual elementary propositions. Evidently, early Wittgenstein espouses Cartesianism and maintains clear distinction between language and the world.

If we recall the earlier part of this paper about Brenders' concept of proposition and his argument for the distinction between semantic and pragmatic meaning, we will find that Brenders reflects perfectly the Early Wittgenstein. No wonder that Brenders persists in the position that any sentence can be a proposition in which we can extrapolate referents and predication, and that an infinitive clause in a sentence can

also be regarded as a proposition which is equivalent to the idea of an elementary proposition in terms of early Wittgenstein.

In contrast to early Wittgenstein, later Wittgenstein holds that language is a game. It is not a direct reflection of the world. To understand the world, one must understand what rules of the language game people are using to talk about the world. Since people have different experiences in the world, they have developed different rules for the game, therefore different people are playing different games. In this view, meaning is fluid state, or in constant change, because people may change the rules of the game. And since one group of people may not notice the change of rules by the other group of people in talking about the world, therefore misunderstanding is inevitable between groups of people.

Clearly, CMM matches later Wittgenstein's perspectives. It holds that meaning is hierarchically organized and the lower level of meaning can be changed due to the change of meaning on the higher level in the hierarchy. The hierarchical ordering of meaning from the top to the bottom proposed in 1980's model of CMM is: archetypes, life-scripts, episodes, contracts, speech acts, content. Once the higher level of meaning is determined, the lower level of meaning will be determined. Wittgenstein's terms, once the rules of the game is understood, the meaning of any particular word or sentence will be understood consequentially. It is worth noting that I do not think that CMM will deny conventional part of meaning in analogy to the convention or norms of social world. The difference between CMM and Brenders with regard to this part of meaning just mentioned will be whether or not they are willing to subject that part of meaning to the mercy of contexts hence to the possibility of change. CMM is willing to do that whereas Brenders is not.

Since CMM and Brenders have embarked on totally different philosophical tracks their polemic can never be resolved. In terms of the Jewish folklore as mentioned by Cronen et al, CMM is going to Minsk while Brenders is going to Pinsk. They can never meet together.

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